A NOTE ON KING HARISIṀHA OF MITHILĀ

By

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Recently Dr. R. C. Majumdar has published a paper dealing with King Harisiṁha of Mithilā,[1] who was the last great King of the Karṇāṭa dynasty founded by Nānyadeva in Mithilā in A.D. 1097-98.[2] He had a stormy political career, and he was a zealous reformer and an indomitable warrior, who will go down in the history of the land for his brave exploits and memorable deeds.[3]

I

In his valuable paper Dr. Majumdar has raised some significant points, which deserve the attention of scholars. These points may be summarised as follows:

(1) Bhūpālasiṁha ruled after Śaktisiṁha and before Harisiṁha, according to a seventeenth century epigraphic record of Pratāpamalladeva[4], the King of Nepāl.

(2) Harisiṁha ascended the throne of Mithilā in about A.D. 1285, and not in A.D. 1303 or 1307.

(3) Harisiṁha scored successes against the Muslims "either during the last days of the Mamluk Sultāns after the death of Balban (A. D. 1287) or during the chaos and confusion that followed the death of Alā-ud-dīn Khaljī (A.D. 1316)."[5]

(4) The conquest of Nepāl by Caṇḍeśvara, his minister, "need not necessarily be referred to a time after the defeat of Harisiṁha by Ghiyās-ud-dīn Tughluq".[6] The *tulā puruṣa* ceremony, celebrated by Caṇḍeśvara in A.D. 1314 followed upon the conquest of Nepāl as suggested by M. M. Chakravarti, and this seems, "a very reasonable view".[7]

(5) Harisiṁha was not defeated; on the other hand he "successfully defended" himself in his impregnable citadel in the dense forest of Nepāl Terāi, while the Muslim army overran the plains of

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[1] R. C. Majundar, *King Harisiṁha of Mithilā* in *JBRS*, Vol. XLIII, pts. i-ii, 1957 (March-June), pp. 1 ff.

[2] For other details see the author's book, *History of Mithilā*, Chap. V (abbreviated *HM*); R. K. Choudhary, *Annals*, *BORI*, XXXV. 91 ff.

[3] *HM*. 278 ff; R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.* See also his *History of Bihar*, 110-12.

[4] *IA*. IX. 188.

[5] Majumdar, *op. cit.*, 2.

[6] *Ibid.* 3.

[7] *Ibid.* 3.

Tirhut. He was, however, forced to leave the plains of Tirhut probably on the 14th Dec. A.D. 1325 (not in A.D. 1324); abandon his own kingdom and settle in Nepāl, which had already acknowledged his suzerainty, and that he entered, *not conquered*, Nepāl[1].

II

From the inscription of Pratāpamalladeva of Kāthamandu, referred to above, we learn that Bhūpālasiṁha was the predecessor of Harisiṁha, who, like Malladeva, son of Nānyadeva, may be treated as "a forgotten king of Mithilā". But, while we have one inscription in the name of Malladeva[2], we have nothing as such to the credit of Pratāpasiṁha to enlighten us on his reign-period. Candra Jhā also quotes a *Pañjī*-verse running on the same line[3]. In the geneology thus presented it is nowhere explicitly mentioned that Bhūpāla succeeded as "King" immediately after the death of Śaktisiṁha, the father of Harisiṁha[4]. He is, however, referred to as "King" which does not necessarily mean that he ever ascended the throne. He was entitled to this royal prerogative because he was the real claimant to the throne. Had he been alive and ruled over the land even for some time, there are no reasons why the contemporary works should have kept silent on his reign while they have eulogised the petty deeds of Harisiṁha's predecessors and of Harisiṁha himself in no uncertain terms. Moreover, we have to remember that the inscription of Pratāpamalla is based on hearsay and has nothing to do with the official *Vaṁśāvalī* which are often so conflicting in nature and presentation of facts.

This assumption is not "gratuitous", but is quite reasonable in view of the evidence at our disposal. Śaktisiṁha's help to Alā-ud-dīn Khaljī in course of the latter's Ranthambhor expedition in 1300 A.D. is no doubt based on a Mithilā tradition, recorded by Vidyāpati in his *Puruṣa-parīkṣā*,[5] which, though slightly conflicts with the account given by Mullā Taqiā in his *Diary*, nevertheless finds indirect corroboration from it.[6] It is true, the tradition is not supported by any other Muslim chronicles, but it is also true that this event, though an object of pride for the Maithilas, was not so significant as to merit the attention of the contemporary Muslim chroniclers, for Śaktisiṁha represented a tiny tract with nothing remarkable to command their genuine respect.

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1 *Ibid.* 6-7.
2 *HM.* 254 ff.
3 *Ibid.* 279 fn. 1.
4 D. R. Regmi believes that Bhupālasiṁha was the father of Harisiṁha. This view is absurd, for it goes against all established historical facts (*Ancient & Mediaeval Nepāl.* 152).
5 cf. *Dayā-vīra-kathā-prasaṅga*; Caṇḍesvara in his *Kṛtya-cintāmaṇi* also describes him as "हम्वीरध्वान्तभानुः" *HM.* 276 fn. 1.
6 For full details, see *HM.* 275-76, 276 fn. 3; R. K. Choudhary, *History of Muslim Rule in Tirhut* (in print).

The whole trouble lies in the fact that sometimes we take for granted everything contained in an epigraph and ignore the eulogistic character of such documents. Had it been a contemporary record, we would have taken it as *ipso-facto*. But, as we know, the record was issued some three hundred years after, and that too in a foreign land, whereas the land of his birth and activities has nothing to record in his favour. If Harisiṁha's reign is placed in 1303 or 1307 A.D., and not in the last decade of the thirteenth century A.D., it does not at all create the problem of missing link in the political history of Mithilā,[1] and for that matter, in the history of Bihar. It is, on the other hand, fully in consonance with the date of Śaktisiṁha's death recorded in contemporary literary accounts of A.D. 1296., for Harisiṁha is said to have been a minor when he ascended the throne and the administration was looked after by Caṇḍeśvara, his able and faithful minister. Moreover, the tendency to disregard the local traditions as always untrustworthy, when they do not suit our hypotheses, is rather deplorable for it is these traditions that vouchsafe light when light from other sources begins to fail. It is all the more true in case of Mithilā, which has been a land of literary and philosophical traditions through centuries, and which has no recorded history fully based on official documents and other historical sources.

III

A verse in the *Dāna-ratnākara* of Caṇḍeśvara says that the king rescued the earth flooded by the *Mlecchas*.[2] Jyotirīśvara's *Dhūrtta-samāgama* (a two-act comedy played in the court of Harisiṁha in Nepāl) also records that the king conquered the Suratrāṇa or Sultan, meaning some Muslim King or Chief. The introductory verse to *Sugati-sopāna*[3] further confirms the statement by giving a poignant picture of the chaotic condition of the time. All these statements clearly show that Harisiṁha had to fight against some Muslim invader whom he ultimately succeeded in defeating.

The above statements have not been taken to refer to Harisiṁha's fight with Ghiyās-ud-dīn Tughluq in A.D. 1324 as Dr. Majumdar takes it to be. We have thoroughly dealt with this aspect of Muslim invasion showing that this invader-Sultan was probably Bahādur Shāh, the King of Bengal, for it is said that at the instigation of Bughra Shāh, the eldest son of Firuz Shāh, and the brother of Ruknuddin and his brother Nasiruddin (who took refuge with Emperor Tughluq Shāh in A.D. 1320, after having been defeated by his brother, Bahādur Shāh), Emperor Tughluq Shāh or Sultan Ghiyās-ud-din Tughluq Shāh invaded Bengal. When the Imperial army left for Delhi, Bahādur Shāh returned to Sonārgāon while Nasiruddin joined the Emperor at Tirhut, submitted to him and went to

[1] *HM.* 279-80.
[2] Mitra, *Notices*. VI. 135, No. 2069 (verse 2).
[3] Intro. Verse 4.

Lakhnāwati where he was confirmed by the Emperor as Governor.[1] It is, therefore, natural to conclude that the composition of the *Dāna-ratnākara* and the *Dhūrtta-samāgama* took place only after the expulsion of this invader, who had tried to usurp the Kingdom of Mithilā but failed,[2] probably sometime after A.D. 1316. Hence the exulting references to the victory of Harisiṁha and his ministers over the Muslim Sultan after a long and bloody fight.

The theory of the conquest of Nepāl is another knotty problem, which has been variously interpreted by different scholars. Dr. Majumdar following M. M. Chakravarti, believes that Nepāl had acknowledged Harisiṁha's suzerainty long before he entered Nepāl in A.D. 1325 and settled there, after having been forced by the armies of Ghiyās-ud-din Tughluq to leave Tirhut. In support of this contention it is said that Caṇḍeśvara performed *tulā-puruṣa* ceremony in A.D. 1314 (which evidently followed upon the conquest of Nepāl)—a fact recorded in *Kṛtya-ratnākara*[3] of Caṇḍeśvara.

Another writer believes that the conquest of the valley of Nepāl was effected in A.D. 1314.[4] The chronicles of Wright and Bhagwānlal put A. D. 1324 as the first date of occupation of the Nepāl Valley by Harisiṁhadeva.[5] According to the former, Harisiṁha, however, could not retain his conquest for long partly due to the stiff resistance put up by the Malla rulers and partly due to the hovering clouds of the Tughluq invasion over the horizon of his original kingdom of Tirhut. But when he was forced to retire to the hills by the conquering Tughluq armies he devoted himself solely to the consolidation of his position there.[6] Yet there is another scholar who has of late advanced the theory that this conquest of Nepāl by Harisiṁha was not effected at all.[7]

In face of these conflicting versions, it is very difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion. If we take the view of M. M. Chakravarti to be "very reasonable", then how is it that the *Vaṁśāvalī* and the earlier inscriptions of Nepāl have nothing to say on this most important episode of Nepāl history in the first decade of the fourteenth century ? Supposing that this conquest was a reality, what about the ruler or rulers who were installed there by Harisiṁha to rule in his name ? But the history of Nepāl during the period under review is full of conflict and warfare and rules out any possibility of such a stable government. We, therefore, fail to understand how Harisiṁha's entry into Nepāl could have been so smooth as to allow

[1] *HM*. 404; R. K. Choudhary, *Annals*, *BORI*. XXXV. 115-16 and his forthcoming book, *History of Muslim Rule in Tirhut*; *HB*. II. 84; *CHI*. III. 133-34; *RS*. 84. fn. 1; *RR*. 18; *TA*. I. 213 etc.

[2] For another version, see *HM*. 404, fn. 4.

[3] *I.O. Cat*. III. No. 1387.

[4] D. R. Regmi, *op. cit*. 150 ff.

[5] *Ibid*. 150.

[6] *Ibid*. 150-51.

[7] Petech. *Mediaeval History of Nepal*,......published recently from Rome, 1958.

him to devote solely to the consolidation of his power and position there, quite unchallenged and unobstructed. It is very difficult to believe that a king who was uprooted and chased from his own country could have had so easy a movement in a foreign land like Nepāl. The *Vaṁśāvali* and the later inscriptions throw a good deal of light on Harisiṁha's descendants, who happened to rule over the territory after him. All these show that the conquest was effected only after his rout at the hands of the Muslims, and not prior to that. Had it been otherwise, Mithilā traditions and other contemporary accounts would not have left it unnoticed and ignored. Caṇḍeśvara's account at best refers to the skirmish between the then Nepalese king and the forces of Harisiṁha in which the former was defeated. He nowhere states that Nepāl, after having been conquered, *was also occupied.* As the borders of these two territories overlapped each other, such skirmishes might have been frequent.

Moreover, it is not unnatural that a fleeing king should conquer another territory. Such instances are numerous in history. Isāmī, the author of *Futūh-us-Salātin,* whose account has been accepted by Dr. Majumdar, nowhere refers to an open and sanguinary battle between the Rājā of Tirhut and the armies of Ghiyās-ud-dīn Tughluq. We are simply told that the rājā retreated into the northern hills. It is thus clear that Harisiṁha had not to lose even a single soldier, and, therefore, with the preparations that he undertook to meet the challenge of the invading Muslims, he could have easily conquered the Nepāl Valley, which was then torn asunder due to the conflicts of the rival claimants. Moreover the traditional verse "त्यक्त्वा स्वपट्टनपुरींहरिसिंहदेवोदुर्देवदेशितपथे गिरिमाविवेश" clearly indicates that he entered the hills, *and not Nepāl*, as Dr. Majumdar has interpreted it to suggest.[1] In other words, it is more reasonable to suggest in the present state of our knowledge that Harisiṁha conquered Nepāl, after fleeing from the plains, and settled there for the rest of his life.

That Harisiṁha never conquered Nepāl as suggested by one writer, referred to above, goes against all historical traditions and genuine inscriptional evidence. It is, therefore, not to be taken seriously so long as other materials are not coming to light to confirm its genuineness.

As regards Ghiyās-ud-dīn's conquest of Tirhut it is clear from all available accounts—Muslim or non-Muslim—that Harisiṁha had to flee away from Tirhut and seek refuge in the hills. The Muslim army overran the whole plain of Tirhut while, we are told, Harisiṁha "successfully defended himself in his impregnable citadel in the dense forest of Nepāl Terāi".[2] This so-called "successful" heroic and gallant defence carries no meaning in view of the fact that he was forced to abandon his capital and go over to Nepāl. Whether or not he had to face an open encounter, the fact remains that he was subdued and forced to leave his own kingdom.

[1] Majumdar, *op. cit.* 6. For the full verse see *HM.* 284 fn. 2.
[2] Majumdar, *op. cit.* 4.

There is nothing to be surprised at the site of his capital seat, for Harisiṁha is said to have transferred his capital to Simrāon—a place which was geographically and strategically quite safe keeping in view the impending Muslim invasion and plunder. His predecessors had their capital seat at other places, and by the time of Śaktisiṁha the Muslim invaders had already reached the borders of Tirhut. Foresight and statesmanship demanded that the old capital seat must be transferred to a safer place, from which the king could successfully resist and thus escape the depredations caused by the advancing Muslim onrush. Simrāon, as we know, was situated on the Nepāl-Tirhut border having the dense and impregnable jungles of Nepāl at the back, where he could easily take shelter in times of emergency which he actually did when the occasion arose.

It makes little difference if we accept A.D. 1324 or 1325 as the probable date for Harisiṁha's entry into Nepāl. In either case there is a difference of a few months which do not in the least affect the Mithilā chronology. Mithilā tradition, however, refers to 1245 Śaka or A.D. 1323-24, and the accounts of the Muslim historians also tend to confirm it.[1] Any way, in our opinion, there is no harm if we accept or reject the other date.[2]

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[1] For different views, see Levi, *Lé Nepāl*. II. 220; H. C. Roy, *Dynastic History of Northern India*, I. 217 fn. 2; *JASB*. 1915 (N.S.). pp. 111-12, fn. 4 & 5; LXV pt. i, pp. 30-31.

[2] For a defailed account of the Muslim invasion of this period, see R. K. Choudhary, *History of Muslim Rule in Tirhut*; Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, Vol. II, chap. I (unpublished).

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOL. XLIII SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER, 1957 PARTS III & IV



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY, PATNA